

GLASGOW'S NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETIES – AN UPDATE

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GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY AND ITS ORIGINS

The last published histories of our own and other natural history societies in Glasgow were those of John R. Lee and Donald Patton, produced at the time of the Society's Centenary in 1951 (Lee, 1952; Patton, 1952). Since that time there have been many changes. However, before looking at what has changed, it is useful to be aware of some of the earlier history.

On 2nd July 1851, nine 'gentlemen interested in the pursuit of natural science' agreed to form a society under the name of **The Natural History Society of Glasgow**. These first members were eminent local naturalists of their day with a wide range of interests. William Gourlie (d.1856), the first President, was a botanist and conchologist. James Fraser was a geologist, Thomas Ferguson (d.1907) was an entomologist and ornithologist and his brother William Ferguson (d.1904) was a geologist and botanist. William B. Lorrain (d.1857) and Thomas Gray (1820-1910) were both conchologists and Thomas's brother John Gray (1828-1878) was chiefly interested in entomology. Robert Gray (1825-1887) was an ornithologist and later wrote *The Birds of the West of Scotland* (Gray, 1871), and his brother Archibald Gray (d.1873) was the other original member (Woodward, 1991).

Professor John Scouler (1804-1871) from Dublin addressed the Society within a week of its formation and was elected as the Society's first Honorary President. Roger Hennedy (1809-1876), who was later to write the *Flora of Clydesdale* - the first published flora of the area (Hennedy, 1865), also joined at this time. Over the next 150 years there would be many more eminent members (Fig. 2).

The Society met at 12 South Hanover Street until May 1852, when they moved to the Andersonian College (later the Royal Technical College and now Strathclyde University) on George Street. This was to be their home for many years.

The Natural History Society of Glasgow was not the only such organisation to be formed in Glasgow. Several other societies existed at the same time, and several of them eventually merged with the Natural History Society of Glasgow.

The **Glasgow Naturalists Society** was founded in 1858. They amalgamated with the Natural History Society in 1866. One volume of their 'Manuscript Magazine' from 1863 containing some marvellous illustrations (Fig. 1, front cover) survives in our archives. Such 'publications' were hand-written, and were passed from member to member.

The **Glasgow Society of Field Naturalists** (Fig. 3) was founded in 1871 and produced the 'List of the Fauna and Flora of Clydesdale and the West of Scotland' for the 1876 meeting of the British Association in Glasgow. They also published an Annual Report and Transactions. Their President was the eminent botanist, James Stirton (1833-1917). They amalgamated with the Natural History Society of Glasgow in 1879.

In 1883 the **Glasgow Practical Naturalists Society** was formed in the old Kelvingrove Museum principally for the practical study of the entomology of Clydesdale. One of their objects was also to prepare a catalogue of insects taken in Scotland. They do not appear to have kept their name for long and by 1886 they had taken the name of **Clydesdale Naturalists Society** (which had previously existed under the aegis of the Glasgow Philosophical Society from 1850-1865). They also merged with the Natural History Society about 1890.

The **Glasgow Eastern Botanical Society**, formed in 1876, merged with the Natural History Society in 1898. A few botanical specimens collected by members of this Society still exist in the collections of Glasgow Museums (Fig. 4).

Following a series of botany evening classes run in the Andersonian College, 16 gentlemen decided to form a society in August 1885. At the suggestion of the governors of the College they took the name 'Andersonian' to avoid confusion with the Natural History Society of Glasgow, and so the **Andersonian Naturalists Society** came into existence. The 'Andersonians' considered themselves very much 'amateur' naturalists, as opposed to the more academic Natural History Society. However, over the following years, several individuals were members of both societies.

In 1886 the **Microscopical Society of Glasgow** was formed by enthusiasts from Mr. J.C.Christie's Geology Class, also at Anderson

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Mr. The Rev. & James Ferguson

The Natural History Society of Glasgow.

Instituted in July One Thousand eight hundred and fifty one for the advancement of Natural History, has this day elected you a Corresponding Member In Testimony whereof We the President, Vice President and Secretary sign this Diploma and append to it the seal of the Society.

Glasgow 30th March 1869

Hugh Colquhoun M.D. P

John Young M.D. VP

Robert Gray S



W. A. SMITH SC

Fig. 2 A reproduction of a membership certificate for a corresponding member, James Ferguson (1869). The certificates were clearly quite elaborate documents, though whether the fauna and flora used to embellish them were appropriate is open to question. A seal was attached at the bottom. This certificate was signed by Hugh Colquhoun (see Eric Curtis's paper), John Young and Robert Gray.

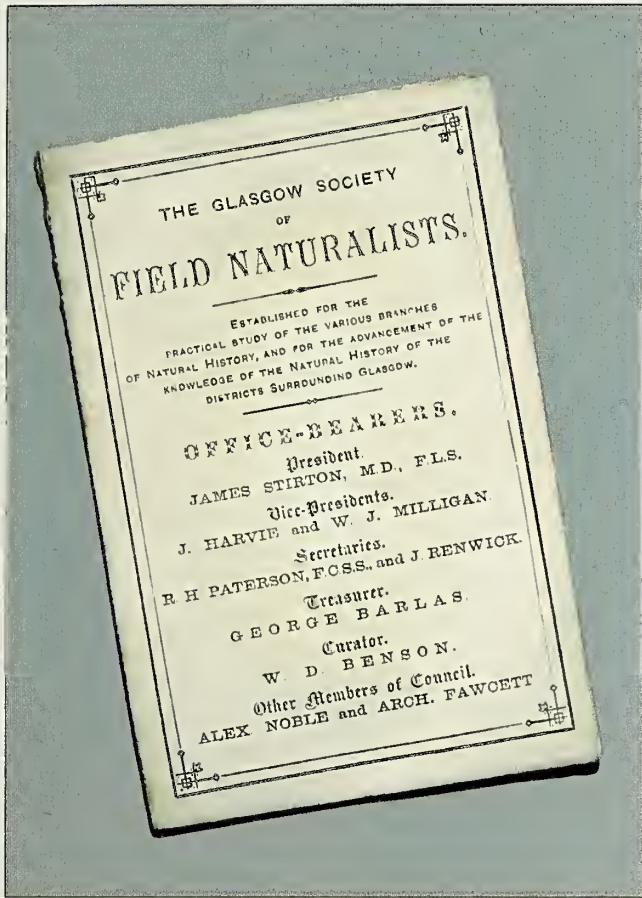


Fig. 3 Syllabus from the Glasgow Society of Fields Naturalists



Fig. 4 Herbarium specimen from the Glasgow Eastern Botanical Society

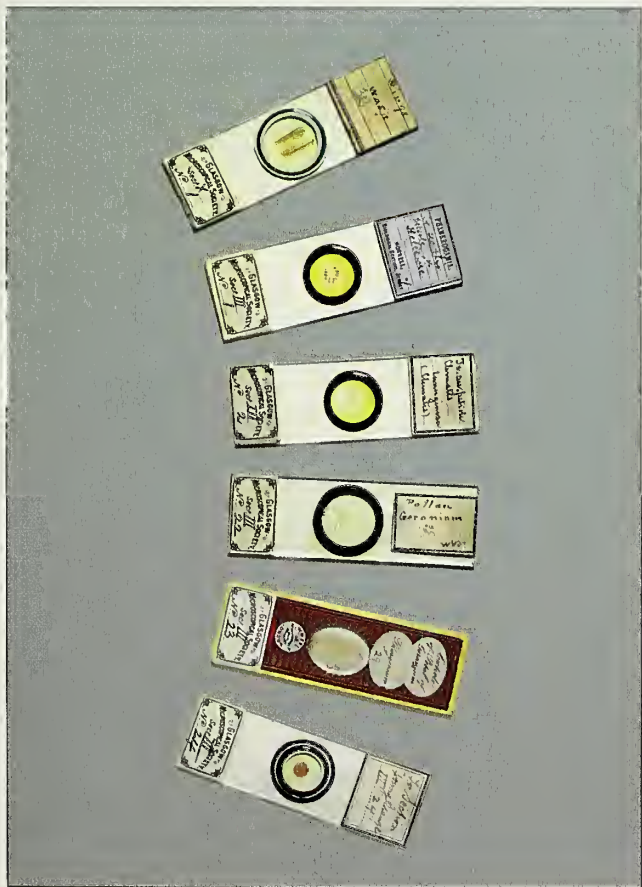


Fig. 5 Microscope Slides from the Microscopical Society of Glasgow



Fig. 7 Cover from the Botanical Quarterly, 1868 produced by the Glasgow Botanical Society

College. The Society was formed 'for the purpose of popularising the use of the microscope as a recreation, of affording incentives to students of nature to engage in original research and to give opportunity for mutual aid by means of meetings at which papers are read, demonstrations given and objects of interest examined.' (See Sutcliffe, 1986 for a longer account). Fig. 5 shows examples of slides made by members of the Society.

In 1901 the Natural History Society of Glasgow celebrated its jubilee and Glasgow also hosted the 1901 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. A special meeting was held in the Masonic Hall, West Regent Street in December with representatives from 'kindred societies and other bodies' to celebrate the Society's first 50 years (Anon, 1902). Numerous speeches were made and congratulatory telegrams read out from notable naturalists and societies from all over Britain.

In the late 1920s it was apparent that the three societies - the Natural History Society of Glasgow, the Andersonian Naturalists Society and the Microscopical Society of Glasgow were all pursuing very similar aims and so it was agreed to amalgamate into one entity. In 1931 they became the **Glasgow and Andersonian Natural History and Microscopical Society**. This name was shortened to the **Andersonian Naturalists of Glasgow** in 1956. Many older members still refer to the Society as 'the Andersonians'. There was some concern in the late 1970s that some members of the public were mis-interpreting the name 'Andersonian Naturalists' as 'Andersonian Naturists', with its associated connotations, so together with the need to better publicise the society, the name was again changed in 1979 to its current name of **Glasgow Natural History Society**.

The Society has received two notable bequests in its long history. The first was the Goodfellow Bequest, which started off as a £100 legacy left by Peter Goodfellow (1887-1933), a former Secretary of the Microscopical Society, in 1933 (King, 1936). The original idea was for the money to be used to pay for regular lectures on a subject related to microscopy. By the 1980s, Goodfellow lectures no longer took place and the fund had become a virtually worthless entry on the annual balance sheet. It was therefore agreed to wind up the fund following a lecture in 1990 (Grist, 1996), but it was also agreed that the Society should still try to hold Goodfellow Lectures on a biennial basis.

In 1991, one of our longest-serving members, Prof. Blodwyn Lloyd Binns, died and left the Society her entire estate, worth in the region of £200,000. As a result, the Blodwyn Lloyd Binns (BLB) Bequest was set up with Trustees to administer the funds. The capital has been well

invested and the Trustees have made available the interest from the investments to benefit the work of the Society and its members. This has made it possible to pay for top quality speakers to come to Glasgow, buy computer equipment, new books for the library, have colour photographs in the *Glasgow Naturalist* and to give numerous grants to members for a wide range of projects and research (Downie, 1998). In addition, another long-standing member of the Society, Mabel Scott, who died in 1998, left a bequest of £1000 to the Society.

In the 1970s the Society held its meetings in both the University of Strathclyde and the University of Glasgow. Since the early 1980s, apart from a short period in the Art Gallery & Museum, Kelvingrove, meetings have been held almost exclusively in the University of Glasgow. The first venue was the Zoology Department, then the Botany Department, and then the Boyd Orr Building before returning to Zoology (now called the Graham Kerr Building) in 1999. The annual exhibition meeting was for many years held in the Art Gallery & Museum, Kelvingrove, but for the last few years it too has taken place in the University.

The Society's library was, for over 100 years, housed in the City's Mitchell Library. By the 1990s it had become clear that the Mitchell Library no longer had sufficient room for the Society's books and following the sale of duplicate and surplus books, the library moved to the Graham Kerr Building of the University of Glasgow in 2000. With money from the BLB Bequest for the provision of many new books together with those given in exchange for reviews in the *Glasgow Naturalist*, the library is again a useful resource for members. It is now housed in the same building where most of the meetings take place, making it much more accessible than in the past.

Throughout the Society's history it has had 'Corresponding members' who kept in touch with the Society, but rarely attended meetings. This is still much the same today, although they are nowadays just 'ordinary' members. Some simply join to receive the *Glasgow Naturalist*. Others are keen to keep in touch with what has been happening in the natural history world around Glasgow.

Since its earliest years, the Society has had different sections with sub-committees to run them. Most of these have been the traditional divisions you would expect - botany, entomology, geology, ornithology, zoology etc. Today, however, we also have a computer section, which is arguably the most important section of all. The Society's computer is used for producing newsletters, posters, membership information etc. as well as for the major work being done on biological recording (See Richard Weddle's article pp). GNHS is now also accessible on the internet at www.gnhs.freeuk.com. The Society has come a

long way since 1988, when the regular billets and newsletters were typed onto stencils for duplicating!

The last anniversary the Society celebrated was in 1985 with the centenary of the 'Andersonian Naturalists' Society with an exhibition in the Art Gallery & Museum, Kelvingrove and a special excursion to Stonelaw Wood, Rutherglen. This was followed by a dinner at Carmunnock, with members dressing up in period costume for the occasion (Fig. 6, back cover).

In the last 50 years the Society has changed its name twice and has undergone major changes to bring it well and truly into the 21st century. It owes a debt of gratitude to all the many office bearers and members of Council over the years who have worked so hard behind the scenes to make everything run smoothly in our rapidly changing world. But, 150 years on, it still retains its original aims – *'to encourage the pursuit of Natural History in all its branches, and to foster a love of this science, by meetings for the exhibition of specimens both native and foreign, the reading of communications, and excursions for mutual improvement.'* Long may it continue.

OTHER GLASGOW SOCIETIES

Patton (1952) mentions a few other local natural history societies which have co-existed with the Natural History Society of Glasgow: The Glasgow Philosophical Society, Glasgow Botanical Society, the original Clydesdale Naturalists' Society, Geological Society of Glasgow, The Glasgow Royal Botanical Institution, the Glasgow Zoological Society, and the Union Jack Field Club.

GNHS's archives include the *Botanical Quarterly*, produced from 1868 by the **Glasgow Botanical Society** (Fig. 7). Like the Glasgow Naturalists' Manuscript Magazine, these 'publications' are hand-written, and were passed from member to member. The editor of the *'Botanical Quarterly'* obviously had a sense of humour as he wrote in its first issue that *'...The price of this magazine has been fixed as low as it possibly could, indeed when we state that the conductors have determined to issue the first numbers at the low figure of 0/0 the public will be prepared to believe our statement.'*

One organisation which was not mentioned by Patton was the **Sylvan Ramblers**, founded in 1885. Whilst not a natural history society as such, they were very interested in natural history. One of their members (Mr James White) even gave a lecture on geology to them in January 1886. They produced two volumes of publications (Anon 1886, 1892). Most of the minutes describe the rambles themselves with interesting historical information and descriptions of places now much changed. They visited a variety of places throughout the

Glasgow area and as far afield as Largs, Edinburgh, Aberfoyle and Loch Awe. There were a few passing remarks about the natural history. The publications were produced *'... to recall to the minds of the members, the various scenes and circumstances which have been to them a source of so much pleasure, in wandering amongst the beauties of Nature, when they have been able for the time being to throw off all the cares and pressures of business which oftentimes weigh heavily upon those engaged in the struggle of life'*. A statement which could just as easily apply to GNHS outings today!

In the last 20 or 30 years, with more leisure time available, many people have become involved with wildlife-related organisations. Many National Societies have grown and have in effect taken on the role of local natural history societies. For example, the **Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT)**, **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)**, **Scottish Ornithologists Club (SOC)**, **Friends of the Earth** and **Butterfly Conservation**, all have local groups or branches and run meetings and excursions locally. Many GNHS members belong to several of these wildlife organisations which generally get on well and sometimes organise joint excursions etc. The RSPB run Wildlife Explorers and Phoenix groups for younger members in the Glasgow area.

In 1982 the **Glasgow Urban Wildlife Group (GUWG)** was formed to act as an information exchange between all the various wildlife organisations and individuals interested in the City's wildlife, and be an umbrella group for all. GUWG tried for many years to build a wildlife garden in the west end of Glasgow and also actively campaigned for the retention of Auchenshuggle Wood in the east end of the city.

They promoted an Urban Wildlife Week, which led on to an annual 'Wildfare' event where all the local environmental organisations had stands to advertise their organisations. For several years this was run by the SWT. GUWG's most substantial achievement was to be part of the consortium that built and staffed Oor Wullie's wildlife garden at the Glasgow Garden Festival (1988). Some of the plants and the boardwork ended up at Mugdock Country Park. GUWG later changed its name to the **Greater Glasgow Urban Wildlife Forum (GGUWF)**. It has not been active since 1998.

GUWG produced a newsletter which became *City Wild* and was for a short time around 1988 called *The Puddockstool* and produced by the Glasgow Urban Spaces Initiative (GUSI) - a Community Programme Scheme project based in the Glasgow College of Technology. This newsletter gave details of many wildlife-related events happening in Glasgow. In the 1990s, Community Service Volunteers, Scotland (CSV

Scotland) took over this role with their *Green Diary*, a free monthly digest of all 'green' events in and around the city. Sadly, due to lack of funding, this was last published in January 2001.

The **Friends of the River Kelvin** (FORK) were formed in 1991. Their aims are to protect, conserve and preserve for the benefit of the public, the River Kelvin, its tributaries and immediate environs and to advance public education in the history, geology, geography and other features of the River Kelvin and the Kelvin Valley. There is much interest in the wildlife of the Kelvin. Several members have a specific interest in natural history and many articles have been written on the River's wildlife in their newsletter *Fork News*.

Other organisations have an interest in natural history, but do not claim to be natural history societies. These include the **Friends of Glasgow Botanic Gardens**, and the **Glasgow Tree Lovers Society**.

There are also three children's clubs with an emphasis on natural history run by the Glasgow City Council's Countryside Ranger Service, based in Glasgow Parks. They are called **The Wild Bunch** (Pollok Country Park), the **Linn Dippers** (Linn Park) and **The Ecos** (Tollcross Park). Some of these are potentially the GNHS members of the future!

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